

## Long American Link with Christchurch

Christchurch has had a long association with American servicemen and civilians. A few U.S. servicemen ventured this far south in World War 2 but close contacts began in the middle 1950s.

In 1955, the United States Naval Support Force Antarctica was formed as part of the International Geophysical Year to be held in 1957-58. This IGY was then the biggest effort made to study the earth's geophysical phenomena, to which the Antarctic was an important contributor.

Responsibility fell to Rear Admiral George Dufek, an officer experienced in Arctic flying conditions. He led seven ships and 1800 men to establish an airfield and operational base at McMurdo Sound, Antarctica. This later developed into the McMurdo Station, which still operates today along with other American stations on the Ice and those of other countries.

But when Admiral Dufek made his first moves to the Ice, he operated from Christchurch and its port of Lyttleton – and all Operation Deep Freeze New Zealand activities have been based here ever since. The Navy's task each summer (NZ) has been to transport scientists back and forth, and around, Antarctica.

Thousands of Navy personnel have been through Christchurch on their way to the Ice and on their way back to the States. They have poured millions of dollars into the local economy over the past 40 years.

More than a handful of service men and women have married local residents and, while most have gone to the States to live, some Americans have remained in Christchurch and some retired to live here.

Relations between Operation Deep Freeze and Christchurch have always been good and a totem pole, erected at Christchurch International Airport, is a symbol of the friendship. It was sent from Portland, Oregon, 30 years ago.

Operation Deep Freeze has changed its character over the years and, in fact, today's responsibility for the support unit operation has fallen to the New York Air National Guard's 109<sup>th</sup> Air Mobility Wing.

The unit, one of three in the US forces which operate ski-equipped aircraft, will support Antarctic operations from October to February, and then the unit gives support for the US program in the Arctic from March to August.

The New York Air National Guard has 24 air-trained crews, and deploys five crews and aircraft to Christchurch for the summer months.

The Air National Guard is a mixture of permanent and reserve staff and started its Antarctic duties in February last year. In its heyday Operation Deep Freeze saw thousands of Navy personnel moving through Christchurch.

So from the early days of IGY Endeavour, under Admiral Dufek, to the present day, American servicemen and women, and scientists have traveled to the frozen continent to carry out scientific work.

They have done so with the support of both the residents of Christchurch and Antarctic New Zealand, which has its own base at Scott Base, cheek by jowl with the American McMurdo Station.

Further information: Operation Deep Freeze: US Air Force ANG Detachment 13:  
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